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Want to join the effort to limit the spread of COVID-19?

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Wear a mask to prevent COVID-19 spread

As increased rates of community transmission of COVID-19 continue in many areas across Canada, and as new variants of the COVID-19 virus are identified, it remains important that you wear a non-medical mask when:

- you're in a shared space (indoors or outdoors) with people from outside of your immediate household
- advised by your local public health authority.

Shared spaces can include:

- parks
- homes
- backyards
- workplaces
- retail settings
- outdoor markets
- street get-togethers
- recreational settings, such as skating rinks
- public transportation, such as airplanes, trains, buses or shared vehicles

Check with your local public health authority on the requirements for your location.

Wearing a mask alone won't prevent the spread of COVID-19. You must also consistently follow personal preventive practices.

Materials, construction and fit

Well-constructed, well-fitting and properly worn non-medical masks can help protect you and others from COVID-19.

How well a non-medical mask works depends on the materials used, how the mask is made and how well it fits.

A non-medical mask can be homemade or purchased and should:

- be made of multiple layers, including
 - at least 2 layers of tightly woven fabric, such as cotton **and**
 - a third middle layer of filter-type fabric, such as non-woven polypropylene
- use materials that are breathable

Does your mask fit properly? (printable poster)

Filters

Using a filter as a middle layer in your non-medical mask adds an extra layer of protection against COVID-19 by trapping smaller infectious respiratory particles.

You can include a filter in your non-medical mask by:

- adding one as a middle layer, using a non-woven polypropylene fabric
 - readily available polypropylene fabrics include:
 - craft fabric

- interfacing material frequently used in sewing
- the non-woven material used to make some reusable shopping bags
- inserting a disposable filter into a pocket on the inside of the mask
 - filters can be purchased or you can prepare your own using a:
 - piece of non-woven polypropylene fabric
 - paper kitchen towel that has been folded in half
 - baby wipe that has been rinsed, dried and folded in half

Reusable masks with a non-woven filter layer can be washed multiple times.

Disposable filters should be:

- changed daily or as directed by the manufacturer
- removed from the mask before washing

2-layer masks

Wearing a well-constructed and well-fitting 2-layer non-medical mask properly will still protect you and others around you.

- If your 2-layer mask has a pocket intended for a filter, insert a filter.
- If your 2-layer mask doesn't have a filter, consider sewing in a pocket for a removable or disposable filter.

Fit is important

A well-fitting mask should:

- be large enough to completely and comfortably cover the nose, mouth and chin without gaps
- fit securely to the head with ties or ear loops
- be comfortable and not require frequent adjustments

- maintain its shape after washing and drying

Proper use

A non-medical mask is most effective when it's worn properly. Uncovering your nose or mouth while wearing a mask:

- exposes you and others to potentially infectious respiratory particles
- won't prevent the spread of COVID-19

Wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you:

- adjust your mask
- put your mask on
- take your mask off

It's important to keep your mask clean when not in use, or when eating or drinking.

Do **not** hang the mask from your ears or place it under your chin. Store it in a clean paper or cloth bag until you put it on again.

Change your mask as soon as possible if it gets damp or dirty. Place soiled masks in a secure, waterproof bag or container until you can wash them in the laundry.

Discard disposable masks and filters properly in a garbage container.

People at higher risk of exposure or more severe disease or outcomes

Some people are at higher risk of:

- more severe disease or outcomes if they get COVID-19
- exposure to COVID-19 because of their work or living situation

If you're at higher risk, you should:

- wear a well-fitting, well-constructed non-medical mask that includes a filter layer **or**
- consider wearing a medical mask if one is available to you

It's important that you wear your mask properly.

If you're sick or caring for someone who is sick

If you've been diagnosed with, or have symptoms of COVID-19, you should wear a medical mask if available when you:

- have to leave your isolation location (for example, to seek medical attention)
- are in a shared space or may come into contact with others

If you're providing care to someone who has been diagnosed with, or has symptoms of COVID-19, wear a medical mask.

If a medical mask is recommended but unavailable, wear a non-medical mask that's well fitting, well constructed and that includes a filter layer.

Children and masks

Children under the age of 2 should **not** wear masks.

Between the ages of 2 and 5, children may be able to wear a mask if supervised. This will depend on their ability to tolerate it as well as put it on and take it off.

Children older than 5 should wear one in situations or settings where they're recommended. A child's ability to properly use and care for their mask is impacted by factors such as:

- age

- maturity
- physical or cognitive ability

People who are hard of hearing and clear masks

If you're hard of hearing or interact with people who use lip-reading to communicate, consider wearing a clear mask.

If a clear mask isn't available:

- maintain at least a 2-metre distance if you must rely on lip-reading to communicate
 - only the person speaking should remove their mask while communicating
- use written communication, closed captioning or decrease background noise as much as possible
 - if writing, don't share pens or paper

Clear masks can also be used in settings where facial expression is an important part of communication.

Face shields

Face shields do **not** replace masks, but can be worn in addition to a mask.

A face shield is used to protect the eyes of the person wearing it. Using a face shield without a mask won't protect you or others from infectious respiratory particles that can escape around the face shield.

If you're unable to wear a mask, you may want to wear a face shield.

Choose one that extends around the sides of the face and below the chin.

You'll still need to:

- maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres
- practise good hand hygiene, especially if you touch the face shield

Neck gaiters (neck warmers)

Neck gaiters (also known as neck warmers) aren't recommended because they:

- aren't well secured to the head or ears, and are likely to move or slip out of place
- are difficult to remove without contaminating yourself

If a mask isn't available and you must use a neck gaiter:

- it should be folded to provide at least 2 layers of fabric and should include a filter or filter fabric added between layers
- lift it away from your face, especially when taking it off
- wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer anytime you need to adjust it, especially when putting it on and taking it off

Scarves and bandanas

Scarves or bandanas aren't recommended because they:

- aren't well secured to the head or ears, and are likely to move or slip out of place
- don't cover the nose, mouth and chin securely without gaps

If a mask isn't available, and you must use a scarf or bandana:

- it should be folded to provide at least 2 layers of fabric and should include a filter or filter fabric added between layers
- it should completely cover the nose and mouth, and fit snugly under the chin

- wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer anytime you need to adjust it, especially when putting it on and taking it off

Masks with exhalation valves

Masks with exhalation valves or vents are **not** recommended. This is because they allow infectious respiratory particles to spread outside the mask. These masks do **not** protect others from COVID-19 or limit the spread of the virus.

Masks in the workplace

When implementing mask (medical or non-medical) wearing policies in the workplace, employers should consult:

- occupational health and safety resources **or**
- their local public health authority.

There may be some non-health care work settings where medical masks may be more appropriate than non-medical masks.

Safety considerations

When wearing a non-medical mask, make sure that it:

- is made of breathable materials
- can be removed quickly and safely if necessary
- keeps your vision clear and doesn't interfere with tasks

Do not:

- share your mask with others
- place a mask on anyone:

- under the age of 2
- who has trouble breathing
- who's unable to remove it without assistance
- secure a mask with tape or other inappropriate materials
- make a mask out of materials that easily fall apart, like tissues

Stigma and those who can't wear masks

Some people may not be able to wear a mask. Be kind rather than making assumptions about those you see without them. For those unable to wear a mask, singling them out in public can be socially isolating and lead to anxiety.

Masks aren't recommended for:

- people who live with illnesses or disabilities that make it difficult to put on or take off a mask without assistance
- those who have difficulty breathing
- children under the age of 2

Environmental considerations

Most disposable and single-use masks are mostly made of plastic. Growing quantities of disposable and single-use masks are being discarded in the regular garbage as there's little to no opportunity for recycling. This increases the amount of:

- unrecycled waste going to landfills
- plastic pollution in the environment or in water sources

By choosing reusable masks, you can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 while also reducing your environmental impact.

If you must use a disposable mask, always make sure that you dispose of it properly in a garbage container.

Related links

- [Travel restrictions in Canada: Entry, borders and transit](#)
- [Medical masks and N95 respirators](#)
- [Use of non-medical masks in community settings](#)
- [How to wear a non-medical mask properly \(video\)](#)
- [COVID-19: How to safely use a non-medical mask \(printable poster\)](#)
- [Regulatory considerations on the classification of non-medical masks](#)

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